An Analysis of the Future of PBS Compared to U.K.’s BBC and Germany’s ARD

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Introduction

Public broadcasting began in the 1920’s with the formation of the British Broadcasting Corporation (Avery, 2011). Avery describes public broadcasting as being:

based on the principles of universality of service, diversity of programming, provision for minority audiences including the disadvantaged, sustaining an informed electorate, and cultural and educational enrichment. The concept was conceived and fostered within an overarching ideal of cultural and intellectual enlightenment of society. (para. 1)

This paper focuses on the television aspect of public broadcasting and the feasibility of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) based on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the ARD of Germany. The BBC was chosen for its rich history, being from an English speaking country, and its popularity as a public broadcasting service. The ARD was chosen because it most closely resembles the history, formation, and organizational structure of PBS.

Hypothesis

Britain’s BBC and Germany’s ARD public broadcasting channels have a secure future because they are full-fledged entertainment channels supported by public funding, whereas PBS in the United States faces an uncertain future because it is primarily an educational channel only partially funded by the government.

This hypothesis holds that PBS faces challenges to its survival compared to the BBC or ARD due to several reasons. The BBC and ARD were the original television networks in their respective country. They have been fully funded by the government through taxes directly meant to pay for the networks. Both networks offer full programming from entertainment to educational. On the other hand, PBS has been around for a shorter period of time compared to the commercial television networks that began in the 1930s and 40s.
It receives part of its funding from the government, but over half of the money comes from corporate sponsorships, local governments, underwriting, and donations. Many of the PBS owned stations have been tied to a school since the formation of PBS (Witherspoon & Kovitz, 1987) and therefore have an educational programming agenda. This has caused low ratings compared to the major private commercial networks. Over the years, Congress has looked to lower or to cut funding to public broadcasting citing budget concerns, low ratings, and ideological differences.

**Research Questions**

Based on the hypothesis the following research questions were developed:

R1: How does the foundation and development of PBS affect its future with respect to how the BBC and ARD where founded?

R2: How does the funding of PBS affect its future with respect to how the BBC and ARD are funded?

R3: How does the programming content of PBS affect its future in comparison to the content of the BBC and the ARD?

R4: How does the competition and regulations in the United States affect PBS’ future as compared with competition and regulations in Britain and Germany?

R5: How do the ratings and popularity of PBS in the United States affect its future with respect to the BBC and ARD in their respective countries?

**Foundation and Development**

**PBS**

The early formation of public television broadcasting in the United States began in May 1953 when the first educational television station launched in Houston, Texas. By 1956, thirty-
one stations nationwide were on the air or being built. The stations were mainly tied to an educational institution like a college or university. The National Association of Education Broadcasters had been an advocate for educational radio and in the 1950s helped to form a non-commercial tape network. In 1965, a group known as the Carnegie Commission was formed to help lay the foundations for the future of educational television and, more importantly, public television (Witherspoon & Kovitz, 1987). President Lyndon Johnson wrote this to the Commission on the importance of educational television:

> From our beginnings as a nation we have recognized that our security depends upon the enlightenment of our people; that our freedom depends on the communication of many ideas through many channels. I believe that education television has an important future in the United States and throughout the world…I look forward with great interest to the judgment which this commission will offer. (Witherspoon & Kovitz, 1987, p. 14)

This letter, along with the opinions of the Commission, helped set the basic principles to which much of the current public broadcasting system in the United States can be attributed. The Carnegie Commission outlined the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and what its role would be in public broadcasting. One of those principles is still very prominent today, “We recommend that the corporation on appropriate occasions help support local programming by local stations” (Whitherspoon & Kovitz, 1987, p. 16).

The Public TV Act set forth the official creation of the CPB with a 15-person board. The board members would be selected by the President and confirmed by the senate. The initial mission of the CPB was to “develop programming, establish an interconnection system, and help develop and support public TV” (Witherspoon & Kovitz, 1987, p. 21). In 1969, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) was formed. The CPB was to be made up of members who
subscribe to its services. PBS was to be run by a nine person board made up of five station representatives, one CPB representative, one representative from national program centers, and two representatives from the public at large (Witherspoon & Kovitz, 1987). Currently, the Board of Directors is made up of fourteen station managers, twelve outside directors, and the PBS president (Board of directors, 2009). In 1973, PBS absorbed NAEB’s Educational Television stations. According to Witherspoon & Kovitz (1987), in 1984 a group of people with interests in public television met and came up with five principles that PBS should abide by:

- Public broadcasting responsibilities are grounded in constitutional and statutory law.
- Because public broadcasting is a public service, it should be responsive to diverse range of good program choices. Public Broadcasting must assure credible public service programming by creating programming which meets the needs and stimulates the interest of the audience; ensuring that programming will be free of undue external influence from all sources; basing programs on their value in the marketplace of ideas, not on financial considerations or pressure. Public broadcasting must conduct its financial affairs in order to assure its supporters and its audiences that their time and resources are used efficiently and effectively. (p. 70)

Localism is one of the major distinctions between PBS and the other public broadcasting services in this paper. PBS is made up of 356 member stations that operate under one of the 156 noncommercial, educational licenses held by member stations. PBS serves all 50 states, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa (McNamara, 2011). According to McNamara, “Of the 165 licensees, 86 are community organizations, 54 are colleges/universities, 20 are state authorities and five are local educational or municipal authorities” (para. 3).
Approximately 117 million people tune into a PBS station at least once a month and 14 million of those people receive a station only via over-the-air broadcast (McNamara, 2011).

**BBC**

John Reith founded the BBC in 1922. The corporation’s mission was “to inform, educate and entertain” (History of Innovation, 2011, para.1). This mission formed the model of what public broadcasting was to be around the world as other countries began forming their own networks. In 1927, the Royal Charter established the BBC as a public service corporation.

According to the Privy Council’s website on Royal Charters (2011):

> Royal Charters, granted by the sovereign on the advice of the Privy Council, have a history dating back to the 13th century. Their original purpose was to create public or private corporations (including towns and cities), and to define their privileges and purpose. Nowadays, though Charters are still occasionally granted to cities, new Charters are normally reserved for bodies that work in the public interest (such as professional institutions and charities) and which can demonstrate pre-eminence, stability and permanence in their particular field. (para. 1)

In 1936, the BBC launched the world’s first public television broadcast. Two competing systems, Marconi-EMI's 405-line system and Baird's 240-line system, were broadcast on alternating weeks until Marconi’s system was chosen in 1937. During the 1950s, the BBC flourished as the premiere source of education, news, and entertainment in England (History of Innovation, 2011).

The Royal Charter constitutionally established the BBC. The Charter outlined the BBC’s autonomy from the government and public obligations (Royal Charter and Agreement, 2011). The current Charter went into effect in 2007 and will last through 2016 (How the BBC,
The Charter authorizes the BBC Trust to be the governing body of the BBC. The Trust is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the BBC and for representing the interests of license fee payers.

The BBC Trust “sets purpose remits, issues service licences; and holds the Executive Board to account for its performance in delivering BBC services” (Inside the BBC, 2012, para. 5). The National Audience Council and the Trust work together to evaluate and meet the needs of audiences. The Trust has twelve members with four special trustees responsible for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. All trustees are appointed by the Queen based on recommendations from the ministers of the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport through the Prime Minister (The Trustees, 2011).

The Executive Board is responsible for operating the BBC through the strategy dictated to it by the Trust. The government is able to somewhat regulate the BBC with the Department for Culture, Media, and Sports, which is responsible for the broadcast industry in the United Kingdom (How the BBC, 2011). Specific operational tasks are assigned to management groups: the BBC Direction Group, the finance committee, Vision, Audio & Music, Journalism, and Future Media & Technology (Executive Board, 2011). “The Board is made up of executive directors from within the BBC and 5 non-executive directors from outside” (Executive Board, 2011, para. 5). The Executive Board is managed by the Director-General who also serves as editor-in-chief of the BBC. The Director-General is appointed by the BBC Trust, while the Nominations Committee appoints all other board members (Executive Board, 2011).

**ARD**

After the fall of Germany in World War II, the states in West Germany founded several public-law institutions. The states didn’t like the propaganda that was broadcast by the
government during the war and wanted to keep these radio and television institutions independent of government or interest group influence. These broadcast corporations were formed to provide informational, educational, and entertainment programming to the public (Augustin & Weismuller, 2009). Once the Soviet Union fell and East Germany reunified with West Germany, the states from East Germany followed suit with the same broadcasting model as the states in West Germany (Augustin & Weismuller, 2009).

Broadcasting councils made up of representatives of the major organized groups in society, who represent the interest of the general public, monitor the public broadcast companies to make sure they stick to the public programming mandate in the constitution. Each public broadcasting company is responsible for the daily insurance of the mandate (Augustin & Weismuller, 2009).

There are nine independent and two national public broadcasting companies that make up the ARD. The independent corporations are: Bayerischer Rundfunk, Hessischer Rundfunk, Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk, Norddeutsher Rundfunk, Radio Bremen, Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg, Saarlandischer Rundfunk, Südwestrundfunk, Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln. The Deutsche Welle is an independent public corporation created under federal law. The ARD was formed for the purpose of promoting the overall interests of the nine public broadcasting corporations. There is also a national public broadcasting company that was formed by the states called Zweites Deutches Fernsehen (ZDF). The ZDF occasionally works with the ARD on programming and the two have several joint channels (Augustin & Weismuller, 2009).

The ARD has created several organizations to help carry out tasks for the member corporations. According to the Augustin & Weismuller (2009):
The major instances are Degeto Film GmbH, responsible for films, the German National Broadcasting Archives (DRA), the Institut fur Rundfunktechnik GmbH (IRT), responsible for research and development work, the Radio and Television Operations Technology Company (RBT), responsible for testing and measurements, the Training Centre ARD.ZDF medienakademie, and the Fee Collection Centre (GEZ). (p. 3)

**Funding Sources and Funding Controversies**

**PBS**

PBS and its member stations get their funding from numerous sources. In 2005, the CPB gave public television and radio $390 million or roughly 16.3% of all funding. Federal grants accounted for $66 million or 2.8% of funding (Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 2006). Since many of the PBS member stations have roots with public universities and colleges, state and local governments often help pay for the operating costs of a public broadcasting station. Local governments contributed $81 million and state governments gave $300 million to member stations. Colleges and universities accounted for approximately $208 million in funding. The single highest source of money came from subscribers at $633 million (Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 2006). Each year stations hold pledge drives to seek financial help from viewers and for many of the big market stations it brings in a substantial amount of money. The Federal government only contributed 19% or $456 million toward public television and radio (Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 2006). The remaining funding, 81% or $1.9 billion, came from non-federal sources (Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 2006). Over half, 56%, of public television and radio’s funding came from non-tax based sources (Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 2006).
PBS is no stranger to controversy when it comes to funding. In 1995, Congress complained that sales of *Barney* merchandise had made $1 billion and that revenues from those sales should have gone to support public broadcasting. CPB President Richard Carlson pointed out that after all the middlemen and retailers got their cut, the producers of the show made about $20 million and PBS was only entitled to a small fraction of that money (Avery & Stavitsky, 2000). During the same time Republicans, led by Newt Gingrich, sought to cut federal tax dollars from public broadcasting. The attempts were unsuccessful and did not gain much traction again until 2011, when the debate of cutting CPB funding from tax dollars came up again. Republicans cited hard financial times and rising debt by the United States government. According to Khan (2011), President Barak Obama’s deficit commission estimated that cutting the CPB would save about $500 billion by 2015. In April of 2011, Congress passed a short-term spending bill that had very little overall impact on the CPB or PBS.

**BBC**

The license fee office of the BBC collects the annual fee charged to every citizen in the U.K. who watches programming on a television set, TV capable computer, mobile phones, DVD/video recorders and other devices. The annual fee for color televisions is £145.50 and £49 for black and white televisions. The cost of color televisions breaks down to £12.13 per month (The License Fee, 2011). Approximately 66% of all the license money collected, or 2.351 billion Euros, is used to pay for ten different television services. Twenty-three percent of the fee goes toward radio and online services. Eleven percent or 406 million Euros helps pay for investment in new technology, running costs, and collecting the fee (The License Fee, 2011).

According to the BBC’s website on the license fee (2011):
The Government sets the level of the license fee. In January 2007, the license fee was agreed for a six-year period with the amount being approved each year by Parliament. More recently the Government decided to freeze the license fee at its 2010 level of 145.50 Euros until the end of the current BBC Charter period in 2016. (para. 5)

Just like PBS, the BBC has had numerous complaints about its funding system. Miller (2007) claims that the BBC is forcing people to choose between clothing and food for their family and having to be legally required to pay for a service that already has too much money. He also claims that the argument that the license fee keeps the BBC independent from government interference is false because the Secretary of State for Culture, Media, and Sport appoints the board of trustees, leaving open the possibility of influence.

There are a handful of websites devoted to stopping the license fee. Many favor subscription-based services by the BBC. A leading critic of the BBC and its license fee is James Murdoch, former chairman and chief executive of News Corporation of Europe and Asia. He claimed in 2009 that state-sponsored journalism such as the BBC interferes with news independence and make it hard for other broadcasters to survive (Murdoch Attack on, 2009). It should also be pointed out that at the time he had an interest in the BBC receiving less money to spend on its services that compete not only in the U.K., but also worldwide with his company.

ARD

Currently the ARD collects 17.98 Euros a month, a basic fee of 5.76 Euros and 12.22 Euros for every set subject to the fee (Augustin & Weismuller, 2009). According to Roxborough (2010) the ARD brings in roughly $10 billion annually. The smaller broadcasting areas receive less than the larger ones, but ARD members often work together. The financially strong ARD members help support the member corporations with lower revenue. The ARD also permits the
sale of advertising on its member stations. They are limited to an average of twenty minutes per day each year. Independent companies designed to acquire and carry out advertising contracts have been formed by many of the ARD corporations. All nine of the advertising companies are members of the “ARD-Werbung.” The members of “ARD-Werbung” formed “ARD-Werbung Sales & Services Gmbh” to serve as their marketing and service company (Augustin & Weismuller, 2009). GEZ is the organization that is responsible for determining and charging the license fee to owners of televisions and radios (Roxborough, 2010).

According to Roxborough (2010), Germany has restructured its license fee system from a per-television set fee to a monthly household tax. The new system will take effect in 2013 and bring in 17.98 Euros per household per month. The new structure exempts low-income families from the tax. The government expects about a .2% deduction in funds from the old structure to the new one. It will also likely lead to the ending of the GEZ.

As with, the other public broadcasters, the ARD has been subject to criticism and controversy regarding its funding. Boston (2004) pointed out that Germany’s public broadcasters have a lot of money at their disposal, allowing them to spend large amounts that commercial stations cannot afford to spend. Commercial advertising revenue fell to about $5 billion in 2003, forcing stations to cut costs. However, in November 2004 the ARD signed Harald Schmidt to an $11.7 million a year contract to host a twice-a-week show. This upset many people because the government announced a $1.15 increase in monthly fees for 2005 before the signing (Boston, 2004).

Many German citizens do not like the television license fee that they have to pay if they own a television capable device. Much of the complaint has to do with the collection and enforcement agency responsible for the license fee, GEZ. In an article published on The Local,
an online news provider in Germany, critics called for an end to the license fee and for a new system to be in place. As part of the new system, they wanted the GEZ to be dissolved because they described the GEZ as being like a "sheriff", constantly spying on and checking houses to ensure the fee is paid (critics call for, 2010, para. 10). As previously mentioned, the license fee is currently undergoing a change as to how the fee is applied and the GEZ will see its power diminished or abolished altogether as a result.

Programming and Programming Controversies

PBS

PBS frames itself as America’s largest classroom offering educational media that helps prepare children for school. PBS takes pride in keeping the arts alive as funding gets cut through programs on music, theater, dance, and art from around the world. In 2010, PBS offered more than 500 hours of arts and cultural programming (PBS Mission and Values, 2009). PBS program topics range from science to history to public affairs (PBS Mission, 2009). PBS also airs a weeknight business news show and a weeknight national newscast. PBS member stations also produce local content geared toward the viewers in local markets. The local PBS station, KMOS, in the authors market of Columbia/Jefferson City, Missouri produces about six series and programs for its local audience.

With the transition to digital television in the United States stations like KMOS were able to offer more program services with their allocated spectrum. In addition to their primary channel that follows the national PBS lineup, KMOS offers two other services, Create and MHZ Worldview. Create airs world travel, art, cooking, sewing, building, and gardening shows. MHZ Worldview is a mix of newscasts from around the world, cultural programming, and world sports.
Programming controversy is nothing new to public or educational broadcasting in the United States. During the second Carnegie Commission in 1977, members of congress complained about numerous programs produced by National Education Television (Witherspoon & Kovitz, 1987).

During 1970 many public broadcasters aired a NET program called Banks and the Poor. The program highlighted that major banks were discriminating against the poor and minorities. At the end of the program a list of Senators with alleged ties to the banking industry scrolled across the screen. The documentary received good reviews from the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal; however, the reaction from many people within the CPB, PBS, and the public at-large was not positive. The event led to a review of how the CPB and PBS funded and aired programming in regards to content censorship and regulation (Witherspoon & Kovitz, 1987).

Another programming controversy at PBS came during the mid 2000s. According to Boehlert (2005) former CPB Chair Kenneth Tomlinson was accused of trying to exert conservative voices into PBS beyond having a variety of viewpoints on shows. According to the article, Tomlinson proposed the imposition of fines on producers of programs he deemed to be biased. The article points to a quote by Tomlinson in Current Magazine, “If a significant number of conservatives are saying public TV is not for them, we need to change that” (para. 15). The New York Times discovered in 2004 he paid $10,000 to an outside consultant to monitor a program for liberal bias. The article cites a survey that found approximately 80% of Americans had a favorable view of public broadcasting (Boehlert, 2005). The survey also found that PBS was viewed as more trustworthy than ABC, CBS, FOX, and CNN. One-third of Republicans
thought PBS had a liberal bias with only one in five of all respondents sharing that viewpoint (Boehlert, 2005).

**BBC**

The BBC offers numerous programs through a wide range of services and just like PBS; the BBC is no stranger to controversy. The BBC operates eight different broadcast services: BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC Four, CBBC, CBeebies, BBC News Channel, and BBC Parliament. BBC One, the BBC’s primary program service, is the most popular service that offers a wide range of mixed-genre programs. BBC Two focuses on mixed-genre programs that have depth and substance for a broad adult audience. BBC Three’s mission is to “bring younger audiences to high-quality public service broadcasting through a mixed-genre schedule of innovation U.K. content featuring new U.K. talent” (BBC services on, 2011, para. 4).

CBBC bring drama, entertainment, comedy, animation, and news to six to twelve-year olds. The majority of the content for this channel is produced in the U.K. CBeebies aims to educate and entertain the BBC’s youngest audiences. According the BBC, “The service should provide a range of programming designed to encourage learning through play in a consistently safe environment for children under six years old” (BBC services on, 2011, para. 7). BBC News Channel delivers “up-to-the-minute, accurate, impartial and independent news, analysis, and insight” and provides “comprehensive coverage of local, U.K. and international events at they unfold and specialist analysis to put the news in context” (BBC services on, 2011, para. 8). BC Parliament shows U.K.’s parliament and legislative bodies in session. It also provides analysis of the issues and politics in debates (BBC services on, 2011).

Like many other broadcasters throughout the history of television, the BBC has faced numerous controversies involving facts, politics, perceived position on issues, and inappropriate
behavior by employees. In November 2006, the children’s show *Peter Blue* was caught in a call-in show controversy. There was a call-in competition to help raise money for Unicef. Viewers paid 10p to enter and had to call the show if they were able to identify the celebrity voice being played (Gibson, 2007). Thinking there was an unidentified issue with the phone lines and no one to declare a winner, staffers grabbed a girl on a tour of the production facilities. According to Gibson, the staffers had the girl pretend to be calling from London and announced her as the winner of the prize. After a parent on the tour went public with what happened, the show admitted to the deception (Gibson, 2007).

The program *One Show* upset many after it showed a dog trainer using unusual tactics that some deemed as animal cruelty to help correct a dog’s behavior (Revoir, 2011a). After one more episode aired it was uncovered that the trainer had no formal qualifications for dog training. The BBC received numerous complaints after the two episodes and the RSPCA started investigating the potential animal cruelty, forcing the BBC to let go of the trainer (Revoir, 2011b).

Programming controversies have led to forced resignations, for example in 1980, Director-General Alasdair Miline resigned under pressure from the Trust after the Thatcher administration complained about the BBC’s coverage of the Falkland War (savethenews.org, 2011). The administration claimed that the BBC was too left-wing in its reporting (savethenews.org, 2011).

**ARD**

All of the corporations of the ARD belong to Deutsches Fernsehen, a program cooperative of the ARD, and provide financial support based on their own financial stability. A committee determines programming and is assisted by controllers assigned to the different types
of programs. The ARD provides several television services: Das Erste, ARD Digital, KI.KA, PHOENIX, 3sat, and ARTE (Augustin & Weismuller, 2009).

Das Erste offers programming that extends the gamut of television programming. According to Augustin & Weismuller (2009): “The range extends from regular news and sport broadcast to entertainment shows, various series, political magazine-type programmes, religious, and musical broadcasts” (p. 8). During weekday evenings, the ARD shows an hour or two of news, which is followed with two hours of soaps or other shows that ARD produces.

ARD Digital is ARD’s digital television package. It also has joint television channels, EinsExtra, EinsFestival, and EinsPlus. KI.KA is an all children’s channel that does not air commercials. PHONIX is a joint project between ARD and ZDF that airs current affairs and documentaries. 3sat is a satellite channel that the ARD produces with ZDF the shows cultural programs. The ARD, ZDF, and ARTE also have a joint venture channel that focuses on European cultural programs (Augustin & Weismuller, 2009).

There is some tension in Germany between public and commercial broadcasters over programming and funding. According to Boston (2004):

Germany’s cash-rich public TV networks have been luring viewers from commercial stations by copying their lowbrow fare—just as advertising revenues are emerging from years of decline. "ARD and ZDF increasingly show commercial programming in prime time and their cultural programs are shoved into slots late at night," says Georg Kofler, CEO of pay-TV channel Premiere, referring to the leading public broadcasters (para. 3).

Even outside of Germany there is growing tension from other countries over Germany subsidizing ARD programming that directly competes with private companies (Boston, 2004). In 2004 Brussels began to investigate Germany’s public broadcasting.
the World Cup soccer tournament and the ARD and ZDF paid for the rights to air 49 matches live for $326 million (Boston, 2004). According to the CEO of ProSiebenSat1 the amount paid for the rights is three times the amount of advertising revenue that the public broadcasting organization can make in the three-week period (Boston, 2004). The CEO is implying that public money is going to help pay for the programming.

According to Sumrada and Nohlen (2005), the Commission of the European Communities initially found that the public funding of sports programming on the ARD did not create any market distortions. The Commission stated that only if the ARD bought and did not air sports programming then it would have created market distortions. The Commission did question why the ARD did not sub-license any of their exclusive rights to certain sports programming (Sumrada & Nohlen, 2005).

**Media Landscapes of the Given Public Broadcaster’s Country**

**PBS**

The United States has the biggest, most intricate television industry in the world. Television viewers have access to programming via the Internet, cable, satellite, and traditional terrestrial broadcast. The average United States household received 118.6 channels in 2007 (Nielsen, 2008). According to Nielsen’s State of the Media 2010 U.S. Audiences & Devices (2011), there are 115.9 million households in the U.S. with at least one television. The average U.S. household owned 2.5 television sets. There were 104.7 million households that were capable of receiving cable and/or satellite. Nearly half, 55.6 million, of those homes had active cable subscriptions and 34.7 million had satellite subscriptions. In 2010, the average American watched 35.6 hours of television per week (Nielsen, 2011). According to McGrath (2008), the average PBS primetime show scored about a 1.4 rating. Compare that to the average CBS or Fox
primetime show with a 3.4 rating, ABC primetime show with a 2.8 rating, and NBC primetime show with a 2.6 rating during the fall 2011 season (Seidman, 2011). Even the all-Spanish language network, Univision, had a higher average rating than PBS at 1.5 during the fall 2011 season (Seidman, 2011).

According to Free Press (Ownership chart, 2011), there are six big corporations that own a majority of the cable and broadcast networks in the United States. They include: General Electric, Walt Disney, News Corp., TimeWarner, Viacom, and CBS. Some of General Electric’s holdings include a minority stake in NBC, Bravo, MSNBC, and twenty-six television stations. Walt Disney’s holdings include the ABC television network, ESPN, and Disney Channel. News Corp.’s holdings include Fox broadcasting and National Geographic. TimeWarner’s holdings include TBS, TNT, HBO, Cinemax, and CNN. Some of Viacom’s holdings are MTV and Comedy Central. CBS’ holdings include Showtime and CBS Television Network. Eight more corporations; Scripps, Media General, Sinclair Broadcasting Group, Belo Corp., The Hearst Corporation, Gannett, Tribune Company, and Cox Enterprises, own a majority of the television stations in the United States (Ownership chart, 2011).

The main regulatory body for television in the United States is the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

The Federal Communications Commission regulates interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories. It was established by the Communications Act of 1934 and operates as an independent U.S. government agency overseen by Congress. (FCC, 2011, para. 1)
The President of the United States appoints the five commissioners of the FCC. The president also appoints one of them to serve as the FCC chairman. The appointees are subject to confirmation by the Senate. They typically serve a five-year period unless the previous appointee did not serve a full five years. At any given time only three may be from the same political party. The FCC is responsible for licensing of broadcast stations and minor content regulation. The FCC regulates content involving indecent programming and commercials during children’s programming (FCC, 2011).

**BBC**

According to Bromley (2010) “the media landscape in the United Kingdom is large, complex and mature, arguably ranking second to that of the USA” (para. 1). There are four public service broadcasting stations that serve the United Kingdom, the BBC, Independent Television (ITV), Channel 4, and Channel 5. The public broadcasters bring in approximately 60% of the market share. Of the 60% market share the BBC makes up approximately 33% and ITV accounts for 25% of the market. The United Kingdom offers nearly 500 television channels via cable, satellite, and terrestrial broadcast. Twenty-four hour news stations account for thirty of the 500 channels and over 90% of the households in the United Kingdom have multiple sources for television channels (Bromley, 2010).

According to Bromley (2010), the government supports minimal control or interference and a market drive by open competition. However, he points out this is somewhat false with the government owning and financing the BBC through a mandated tax causing some market manipulation. In 2003, Ofcom was created to consolidate five different branches responsible for overseeing broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Ofcom has helped to focus more on content control and less on statutory regulation (Bromley, 2010). Ofcom regulates communications and
mores specifically television and radio (Ofcom, 2011). Ofcom operates much like the Federal Communications Commission in the United States. Its two main responsibilities are spectrum licensing and monitoring of content (Ofcom, 2011). Ofcom takes complaints over programming from viewers; however, they do not handle advertising issues and only handle non-BBC related issues (Ofcom, 2011). The BBC is regulated by the Trust, as discussed earlier in this paper.

ARD

According to KleinStueber and Thomass (2010) in 2008, Germany had 82.2 million households with nearly 35 million households owning at least one television. German households evenly watched 219 minutes of television per day between public and commercial broadcasting. Besides the ARD, there is Deutsche Welle (DW) and the ZDF (KleinStueber & Thomass, 2010). Deutsche Welle is known as the international broadcaster of Germany (Deutsche Welle, 2011). According to Deutsche Welle (2011) Website they, “promote understanding of Germany as an independent nation with its roots in European culture and as a liberal, democratic, constitutional state based on the rule of law” (para. 2). The ZDF was formed in 1968 as an “independent non-profit corporation under the authority of the sixteen states making up the Federal Republic of Germany” (ZDF, 2012, para. 1). The ZDF focuses on providing informational, educational, and entertaining programming to Germans of all ages (ZDF, 2012).

There are two companies that operate the majority of the commercial television stations in Germany, ProSiebenSAT.1mediaAG and Bertelsmann. The two broadcasting companies cover half of the German television market. According to KleinStueber and Thomass (2010), ProSiebenSAT.MediaAG has a market share of 21.6 and Bertelsmann has a market share of 24.1%. In the overall television market, the public service broadcasters make up 43.6 percent of
it with the ARD accounting for 13.4%, the ZDF 13.1%, and third channels between the ARD and ZDF accounting for 13.2%. There are numerous regional commercial television stations throughout Germany that account for the rest of the market. Of the nearly 35 million households that own a television, 18.66 million receive it via cable, 14.93 million receive it via satellite, and approximately 1.4 million receive it via terrestrial broadcast (KleinSteuber & Thomass, 2010).

All nationwide media and press laws are created at the regional or state level and agreed upon by all sixteen states (KleinSteuber & Thomass, 2010). According to KleinSteuber and Thomass (2010), German broadcasting laws focus on the “the common good” & “the needs of the public sphere.” However, the country is moving closer to European Union requirements of competition law. Citizens that have complaints about the public service broadcasters may bring them to members of the Broadcast Council. Also, a Commissioner for Youth Protection must be employed at all German commercial television companies, but they are only responsible to report to the company that they work for (KleinSteuber & Thomass, 2010).

Analysis of Research Questions

The following discussion answers research question one in regards to the foundation and development of all three broadcasters and PBS’ future. The BBC and ARD have long histories dating back to World War II. The BBC was founded before the war and after being shut down for several years, it returned after the war. The early part of the ARD was formed in response to the control of the media that Hitler had before and during the war. PBS was loosely organized early on in the 1950s and didn’t really become a national broadcaster until nearly twenty years after the BBC and ARD. This has given the BBC and ARD an edge with more recognition in the minds of viewers as an early national broadcaster.
The BBC and ARD both have limited oversight from the government. PBS’ foundation left open the possibility of government oversight. As pointed out earlier in the paper, the BBC has members appointed by a government agency, but they have no direct say over content or yearly finances. PBS has members appointed by the government and a funding arm that is overseen by the government.

One thing that has been in PBS’ favor is the ability of stations to be localized and provide something for the local community. The ARD is similar in that it has nine regional or state level stations that provide not only national programming, but also things that matter to the local community. For PBS this ability to have localism not only in programming but with community outreach has made it attractive to viewers.

The foundation and development of PBS has some weaknesses when compared to the BBC and ARD. However, I do not believe that there is much in the way of foundation and development that could impact PBS’ long-term future. With some possible adjustments to government oversight, such as a board and a funding system independent of constant review based on individual ideologies, PBS would be stronger in its future.

Research question two address the funding of PBS, BBC, and ARD. An overwhelming issue affecting PBS’ long-term future is funding. With government oversight being a major issue in this area, there are a lot of question marks. Each year Congress makes a budget allocation to CPB and helps fund PBS. As pointed out earlier, as the makeup of Congress changes the allocation of federal dollars is at risk.

The other part of the PBS funding model includes state government, local governments, community organizations, foundations, corporate sponsorships, and viewer donations. With the funding sources come problems during economic hard times. These funding sources create a
problem with no true long-term funding model to ensure enough money is available for PBS to operate. As well as the heavy reliance on private funding sources creates an issue with outside influence on programming and a limited source of money. Corporations and foundations can dictate programming through direct funding and indirect funding pressure. As corporate profits or donation to foundations dwindle in down times, funding of programming can decline as well.

Both the BBC and ARD use a tax-based system to pay for public broadcasting and ensure that each year there is plenty of money for them to use. The BBC has to agree to the tax rate every so many years and have approval by the government in the form of a charter. This charter sets forth the amount of money to be collected for the network. These models help eliminate some government oversight, but are somewhat unpopular with citizens of their country.

Another thing that separates PBS from the BBC and ARD is the overall financing. The BBC and ARD are two of the largest public broadcasters in the world in terms of operating budget each year. The ARD averages nearly $10 billion dollars a year in tax revenue and the BBC brings in around $3 billion each year. PBS’ budget was considerably less.

The United States government directly contributes $390 million to be split between public television and radio each year. This is a major problem for PBS’ long-term future. A long-term funding model must include more federal support either through a direct tax or tax dollars with no interference. A funding model much like that of the BBC or ARD would be of great help to the future of PBS. A tax that is separate from the annual budget set by Congress is needed for PBS to ensure long term funding and independence from constant ideological review. The tax also needs to allow PBS to raise the operating budget to one that’s comparable to those of the BBC and ARD.
PBS would benefit from a reduction in the number of member stations. There are over three hundred member stations that belong to PBS. The BBC has no member stations, only a national network. The ARD only has nine member stations. Reducing the number of stations to one or two per state will allow for cost cutting, better cooperation, pooling of financial resources, removing of program influences, and financial burdens on non-federal funding sources while still maintaining the localism that PBS member station programming provides. Another funding model would be to eliminate all broadcast member stations and focus funding on a national satellite and cable channel. The most important thing to ensure PBS’ future is funding at levels similar to those of its European peers.

Research question three seeks to determine how PBS’ programming affects its future. PBS programming varies from children’s programs, to programs about the arts, and to informative programs like news. While some programs are mainly for entertainment, much of the PBS lineup focuses on the overall mission of PBS programming: educational television. PBS programming comes from stations, associates, and private production companies. PBS itself does not create programming. PBS offers several national primetime programs that member stations must carry, but members have freedom over much of the programming. Local programs are a staple and important part of PBS member station lineups. They help to attract viewers because of their direct tie to the viewer and the viewer’s community.

The BBC offers programs that are meant to entertain viewers with dramas, comedies, and other genres. The BBC also offers news and political talk programs. It operates much like a commercial entertainment station, although focusing on higher quality programming that will serve the public in the best possible manner. The BBC produces much of its own programs at in-house production facilities allowing them to maintain an overall vision. The ARD offers news,
sports, music, political talk, and entertainment programming. The ability of the BBC and ARD to focus their programming efforts on things besides education helps give them a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

I believe PBS should focus a little less on educational programming and more on providing programs that will appeal to more people. In addition to the educational programming already being shown, there needs to be a better balance between entertainment and other programs that American viewers wish to see. Many entertainment programs can contain educational aspects in them and help maintain the original mission of PBS. If PBS were to become too much like commercial stations, it would lose its identity and eliminate the reason it was created to begin with. However, a good amount of PBS programming needs to be high-quality entertainment programming in order to gain market share and maintain its importance in the marketplace. Ultimately, without greater funding PBS cannot create the programs it needs to compete with commercial stations.

The following discussion answers research question four in regards to competition and regulation and the future of PBS. Competition affects PBS differently than the BBC and ARD. The BBC has nearly as many commercial competitors as PBS and more public broadcasting competitors, but maintains a higher market share. The BBC has to compete against ITV, channel 4 and channel 5, while PBS is the only national public broadcaster in the United States. The ARD competes against the ZDF, some of its joint channels with the ZDF, and to a certain degree the international public broadcaster Deutsche Welle. Both the BBC and ARD have to compete not only against commercial, but public broadcasting networks as well. Both are able to maintain a competitive market share against a diverse and equally appealing group of competitors unlike PBS. This leads me to believe that the mere presence of large, diverse competition is not enough
There are no major differences in the regulations of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany. The United States has the FCC, which monitors broadcast content, takes viewer complaints, and license stations. The ARD has the Broadcast Council that viewers can make complaints to. The BBC has the Trust, which ensures that the BBC is serving the public and also takes viewer complaints. In different ways all three organizations make sure the broadcasters are operating in the best interests of the public. I do not believe that there are any major regulations that make the BBC or ARD more successful than PBS. Therefore, I cannot see any correlation between regulations and the future of PBS.

Research question five, dealing with ratings and popularity, is answered in the following. The popularity of public broadcasting in the United States is not at the same levels as in the United Kingdom and in Germany. Public broadcasters in the United Kingdom maintain a market share of 60% with the BBC accounting for over half of it with 33%. In Germany, public broadcasters account for approximately 43% of the market with the ARD having approximately thirteen percent of the market. Not only are these two broadcasters able to maintain a significant portion of the overall market, they are able to maintain a competitive position with the other public broadcasters in their countries. The United States is uncompetitive compared to the BBC and ARD with a declining market share of approximately one percent. The lack of popularity of PBS can be seen directly in its ratings. PBS maintains an average primetime rating of slightly over 1.4 while commercial broadcast stations have an average primetime rating in the upper 2’s.

I believe that the declining popularity of PBS has a direct impact on PBS’ future. As Congress examines the budget yearly it makes it harder to argue for a long-term funding model
and the importance of PBS in the marketplace. With hard financial times and a growing national debt in the United States it may be hard to argue that PBS is a quick cut with its low ratings and market share. Research questions two and three have an impact of the ratings and popularity of PBS. Each could change the popularity of PBS in the marketplace if changes are made.

**Limitations**

One limitation that I faced in researching this paper was the language barrier. With most information on PBS and BBC being in some form of English it is slightly easier to find articles and data about the two public broadcast systems. While many of the German websites try to publish in English, I had to rely on the ARD’s English version guidebook to find much of the data and information. The second limitation I had is that there is not much academic research into the future of PBS. It would be interesting to see how some of the suggestions that I have made in this paper and even the hypothetical enactment of policies of the BBC and ARD on PBS would have in a study of potential viewers perceptions and viewing habits of PBS.

**Conclusions**

The three public broadcasting corporations all have different backgrounds and structure. The BBC and ARD have two similar funding setups while PBS is completely different. The funding and structures are what helps limit their exposure to interference from the government. The BBC and ARD have two of the biggest operating budgets for public broadcasters in all of Europe and even the world. This allows them to have more channels and better programming to meet the needs of all the citizens of their respective countries.

There are three big problems that affect the future of PBS. The first is there is no long-term funding plan. A long-term solution of a license fee or special tax has been proposed numerous times and would help secure the future of public broadcasting. This would allow for
more money for new programming and better overall operations. Funding relates to problem number two; the current funding system and foundation leaves a place for too much government interference. Congress sets the budget each year for the CPB and the government helps to determine the directors that run the CPB and PBS. As the makeup of Congress or the opinions of PBS change, Congress can change the budget and leadership. A third related problem is that a good amount of funding has to come from corporate donations and underwriting. This situation leaves open the possibility of corporate influence on content and stretches the idea of non-commercial. If the United States does not come up with a fix to these problems the future of PBS is in doubt. After years of not enacting on these issues it may also be too late to save PBS much longer.

Author’s Note

It should be noted that the author of this paper worked for KMOS-TV, a PBS member station, in Warrensburg, MO from September 2007 and through the time of writing this paper in November 2011. He also was employed at KSHB, a NBC affiliate, in Kansas City, MO starting in June of 2011 and continuing as well through the writing of this paper.
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